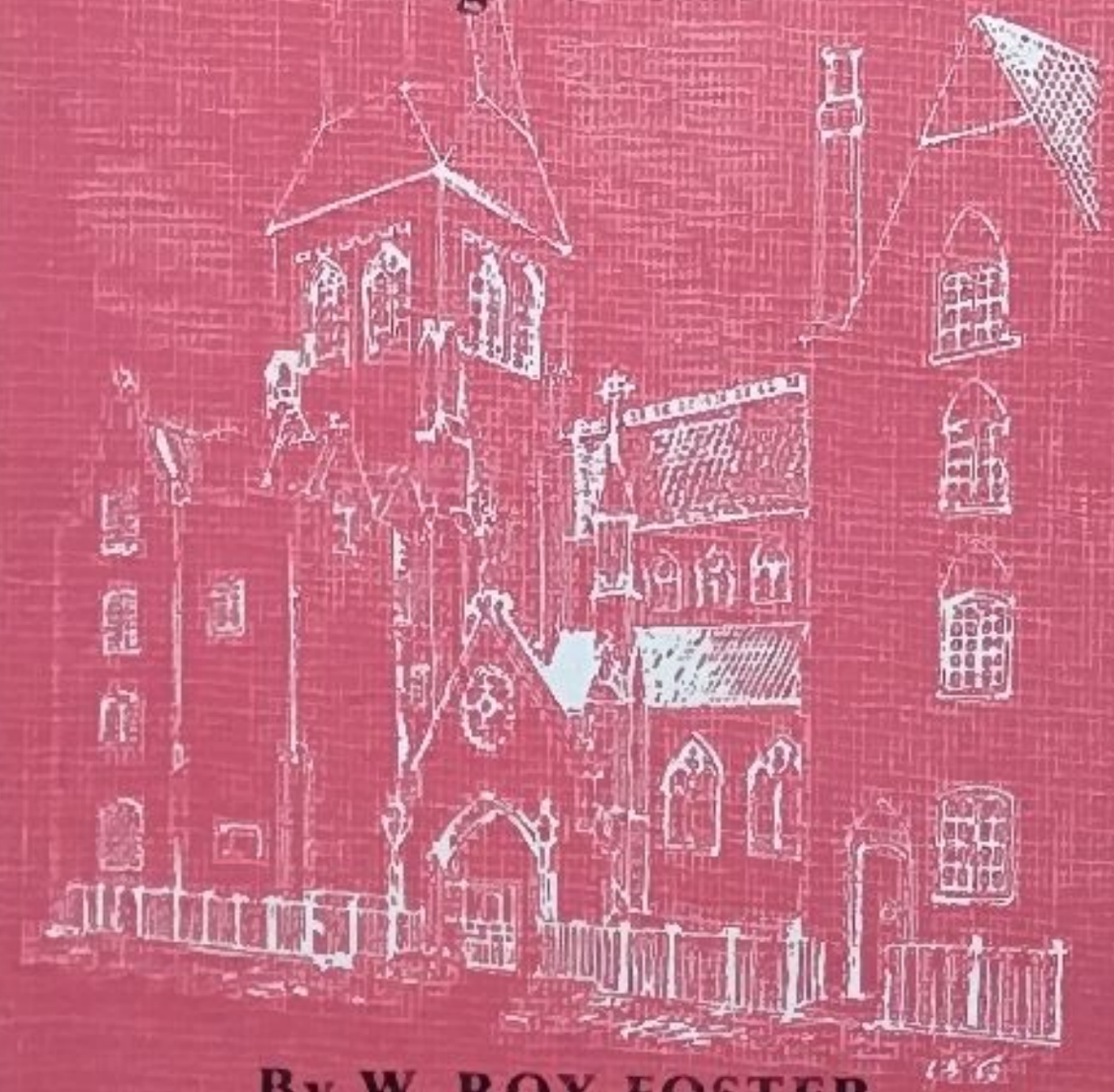
Number Two

THE CHOIR SCHOOL

ALL SAINTS
Margaret Street



By W. ROY FOSTER

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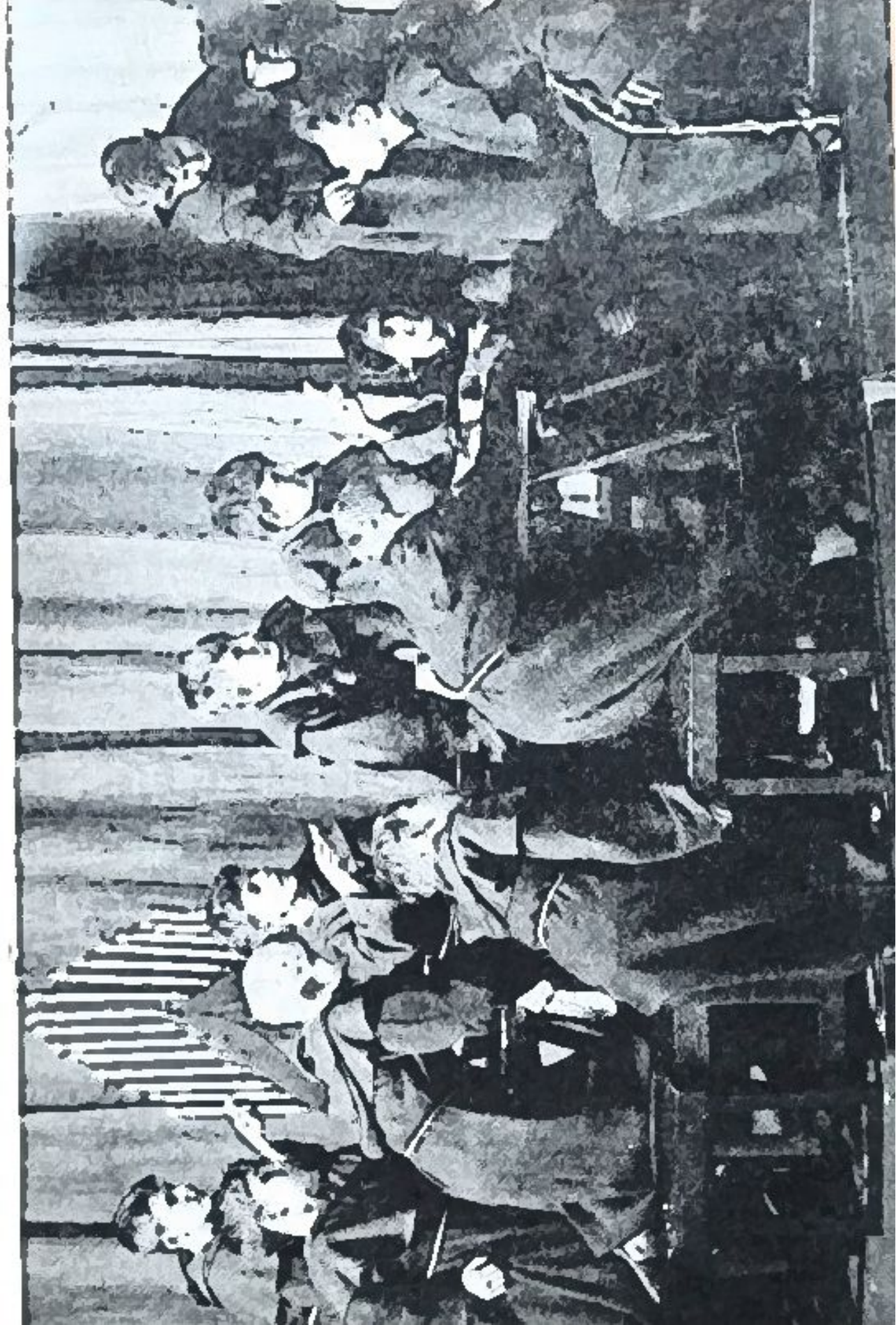
OPPOSITE—*The boys of the Choir School in a performance of one of Laurence Housman's Little Plays of St. Francis*



PREFACE

My grateful thanks are due to the Vicar of All Saints, the Revd. Cyril Tomkinson, for his kind permission to quote from letters and articles that have appeared in the All Saints' Parish Paper.

W.R.F.

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THE CHOIR SCHOOL

WHY A RESIDENT CHOIR SCHOOL?

IN THE PREFACE to "Quam Dilecta", William Allen Whitworth, at that time Vicar of All Saints, stated that "Our Founder's intention was such a *Hallowing of Art* as should render the Services of the Church more fully expressive of the Catholic Faith in glory and in beauty. Thus it was only to be expected that from the very first it was determined that the Music of All Saints, Margaret Street, should be of the very highest order, and that no means should be spared to see that the execution of the music should be as perfect as possible. It was felt that only in a Resident Choir School could both the highest ideals of the use of music in worship be inculcated and the technique of really first-class musicianship be taught". It is the purpose of this little booklet to try and show how during the hundred years of its existence these ideals have been realised, and why the Choir School has become so large a part of what we have become accustomed to call the tradition of All Saints, Margaret Street.

The first name in the School Register—in which Register, by the way, names of new boys are still inscribed—is that of Frederick James Archer who was admitted on St. Andrew's Day, 1848. It was a happy augury for the subsequent life of the Choir School that Mr. Archer should distinguish himself in the musical world. When still very young he succeeded Dr. Chipp as organist at the Royal Panopticon, which stood on the site later occupied by the Alhambra, and which then contained the finest concert

organ in London. Mr. Archer played at the Crystal Palace, and elsewhere, and on the building of Alexandra Palace in 1873 he was appointed organist. After the burning of the original building the organ was restored, and he gave upwards of 2,000 recitals upon it. For some years he was conductor of the Glasgow Select Choir and examiner at Glasgow University. In 1880 he went to the U.S.A as organist of Plymouth Church under the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher.

The Register of the Choir School is entitled:—

REGISTER OF BOYS
APPROVED AND ADMITTED TO SING
AS
CHORISTERS
IN THE CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS
ST. MARYLEBONE
1852

Inside the cover is the inscription:—

W. Upton Richards, M.A. Incumbent
Arthur Baker, M.A. Curate
Thomas A. Perry, Curate
Thomas Jarrett, Master of the Choristers' School,
10, Great Titchfield Street.
Christmas-Tide
1851-2

From the above we may assume that the names of the first Choristers were to be found in some previous Register, and were inserted in the new one a year or two later. It will be noticed also that the Choir School resided at that time in Titchfield Street. At the end of 1851, there were eleven boys in residence; in November, 1852, three were sent away in order to reduce the expense. During the time that the congregation were engaged in building the permanent Church, it was found impossible to maintain even the eight boys; and in August, 1854, the Choir

School was closed until Easter, 1856, when we find a new Choir (under the Mastership of Mr. W. J. Croft) formed of eight boys living in the neighbourhood. It does not appear that a resident Choir School was re-established until the consecration of the permanent Church. In 1860 the Choristers came to live in the present Choir School under the care of a resident Master.

Mention must be made of the six or seven singing-men or Lay-Clerks who, though they naturally have never been in quite such close connection with the Church as the boys, yet by their high ideals, their musical talents and their enthusiasm have made their own very real contribution to the tradition of worship at All Saints, Margaret Street. The Church, too, has been fortunate in having throughout its history those, holding the position of Organist and Choirmaster, who were not only distinguished musicians, but also men of personality. At the moment All Saints Church has the distinction of having an Old Chorister as its Organist and Choirmaster. The successive Vicars of All Saints have always been interested in the School and they have left their mark on it in several ways. A School is often what its Headmaster makes it, and a great debt of gratitude is due to those Masters of the Choir School whose names cannot be found in any Records, but who together with the devoted work of the School Matrons, played their part in helping to make the Choir School what it is today.

The continued excellence of All Saints Choir is shown by the fact that the Choristers sang at both Jubilees of Queen Victoria. They sang too, at the Coronation of King Edward VII, of King George V, and his present Majesty King George VI. All Saints Choir holds with that of St. Margaret's Westminster, the distinction of being the only Parish Church Choirs to be represented at the Coronation. During the War they sang with Richard

Tauber in "Waltz-time", a film made at the Elstree Studios, and more recently they were invited to sing in the presence of Her Majesty the Queen at the opening of a block of flats in St. Marylebone. The Choristers have frequently broadcasted, and have delighted and inspired listeners all over the world.

CHOIR SCHOOL LIFE AND EDUCATION

THE CHOIR SCHOOL is primarily a Christian family. That is to say it has a supernatural foundation and is knit together by devotion to the Will of God and by the bonds of family duty and affection. Choristers feel that they can echo the words of Shakespeare, "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers". The Choir School undertakes the entire education of the fourteen Singing Boys who, together with the Adult Singers, constitute the Choir of All Saints, Margaret Street. The Choristers are trained to make their whole life an offering of perfection for the Glory of God, and the whole system of education and school discipline is based on this ideal. Nothing less than their best is required of the Choristers whether in Church, in School or on the playing-fields. A notable result of this is a certain spontaneous, carefree gaiety which has, for many generations past, been characteristic of them and which proceeds from a disciplined nature in which the human will is deliberately and consciously set in harmony with the loving perfect Will of God. All Saints Church was founded to show in its life and worship the Catholic Revival in the Church of England. With this in mind the Choristers are instructed in the teaching and practice of the Church of England as set forth in that Revival.

The boys are prepared in the usual school subjects for the Public Schools' Common Entrance Examination, and in recent years most boys have passed on to Public Schools

though a few have proceeded to Secondary Schools and Technical Colleges. Boys remain in the school until the age of 13+ or 14, but they are passed on to their next school if their voice should break at an earlier age.

It is not perhaps surprising in a Choir School that nearly every year Music Scholarships are gained to Public Schools. It is, however, no light feat for a boy at the Choir School, with all the additional demands that the musical side of the life makes upon him, to win a scholarship in ordinary school subjects in open competition with boys from other schools, yet this has not been unknown in All Saints Choir School. The type of boy produced by the Choir School is such that Public School headmasters, in spite of their long waiting list, are continually asking for All Saints Choristers to be sent them. Nor is it only at Public Schools that they do well. In 1938 Chief Cadet Captain Ashley Hobson, (afterwards Lieut. Ashley Hobson, R.N., whose early death we mourn) received the King's Dirk at the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth —the highest honour the Naval College could bestow.

In games the fact that an eleven has to be found out of only fourteen boys proves a very severe handicap, yet the Choir School manages to give a very good account of itself in matches with other Choir Schools or Preparatory Schools. The present writer remembers one very exceptional football season when the Choir School won all its matches!

THE CHOIR SCHOOL ANNUAL CAMP

UP TO THE TIME when War broke out in 1939 the Chorister spent a glorious twelve days in Camp every year, usually in the month of June. Dom Bernard wrote after visiting one of these camps, "I shall not easily forget the glorious sweep of cliffs and sea visible from the door of my tent, or the beauty of the Mass and the Night Prayers. Worship is

perhaps less likely to get distracted there than it is among the pneumatic drills and burglar alarms of Margaret Street; but, there or here, the atmosphere of worship depends a very great deal on the boys of the Choir School and their attitude to God and to life as a whole, and I can only thank them for keeping always, as they do, a very high standard indeed; and I thank also from the bottom of my heart those Masters of the Choir School who have in the past and in the present worked and prayed to produce that standard and to maintain it". Fr. Simmonds wrote of the same camp: "It was obvious that the boys were enjoying every minute of it and were thoroughly fit and well. This annual camp is certainly a wonderful investment for all of us who value the privilege of having such a choir. No account, however slight, could be complete without a reference to the Chapel tent, delightfully furnished and adorned, truly the centre of the camp like the Tabernacle of old, for here Mass was said every morning and sung on Sunday. It is the custom also that on the Sunday in camp the Blessed Sacrament shall be reserved, the boys taking it in turn to keep watch. This year that was impossible owing to the high wind which made it unsafe. But at the boys' own request the custom was observed on the Thursday instead. That perhaps explains better than a multitude of words the spirit of the camp and why it is such a happy one. That tent is the symbol of many things, and I shall not forget it".

THE DRAMATIC TRADITION OF THE CHOIR SCHOOL

FOR MANY GENERATIONS there has been a strong dramatic tradition in the Choir School, which, up to and including the momentous year 1939, produced a play every year. In 1922 the School play, fostered by the genius of Father Mackay and Father Heald, was subsequently pro-

duced at the Shakespears Festival at Stratford-on-Avon when Sir Laurence Olivier, then a boy in the Choir School, took the part of Katharina in "The Taming of the Shrew". Richard Keverne wrote of the Play produced by Shayle Gardner in 1937: "At All Saints', Margaret Street, they spoke of it just as the Choir School Play, an annual function—Bernard Shaw's 'Saint Joan' this year, one of Shakespeare's plays last year they thought—but just the Choir School Play that's all. They did not tell you that you were going to see one of the most interesting and remarkable theatrical performances you had ever seen in your life".

"It is no small achievement to take a small stage and hang it with something that looked like sackcloth instead of setting it with scenery, a company of choir boys and teach them to speak their lines with true feeling and without hesitation, four adults who are amateurs, and with them produce Bernard Shaw's "Saint Joan", in such a way as to hold, easily, the interest of an experienced and sophisticated audience for over three hours and a quarter". So wrote Canon T. P. Stevens describing these Plays in an article in the Parish Paper entitled, "Little Plays and Small Players".

In 1939 the Headmaster produced a triple Bill. A. Montaigne wrote: "The same high standard marked this year's production of the two plays 'The Fortieth Man', by Freda Collins, and 'Michael', adapted by Miles Malleson from a work of Tolstoi, together with the first act of Sir Sydney Nicholson's Opera, 'The Boy Bishop', (a joyous interlude), as we have usually found in past years. It is no light thing to say of these same players, that they display greater ease and a finer knowledge of practical stage-craft than many a professional actor; their diction is beauty itself".

A PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERT'S ESTIMATE OF THE SCHOOL

In 1948 Mr. John A. Brenner, a member of the British Psychological Society, and late Fellow in Educational Psychology at the Tavistock Clinic visited the School and conducted psychological tests. He reported, "It was at once apparent that here was a school in which education was held to be something more than the acquisition of knowledge, or of skill at sport, or of attaining scholarships, important though these were realised to be; here, in practice, was a school which transcended utilitarianism and in which the whole child, his soul, his mind, and his body were all the subject of care".

"The results are striking. The first and one of the deepest impressions a visitor must obtain of this school, is that the children, while retaining their individuality, all have one outstanding quality in common, a charming courtesy and a happy friendliness that not only makes them a delight to meet, but shows very clearly that their education is an education in the art of living for the whole of life, as indeed, all real education must be".

"The Choir School is a small school and, in this, enjoys an unique advantage. It is small enough to be a happy family, and to allow a genuine individual attention to each boy, and yet large enough for the children to be able to rub each others' corners off. They are a healthy, happy crowd of boys with a keen interest in cricket and football and a wide variety of interests besides, ranging from boxing to stamp-collecting, while all are interested in music, and, in order that the expression of music may not be denied to them when their voices break, most of them learn to play the piano as well".

"On the scholastic side the attainments of the school are high, and the tests showed that not only were the boys

thoroughly sound but that the intellectual level of the school was far above the average. Indeed some of the boys are outstanding and, given the opportunity will certainly one day win distinction as scholars. Others among them wish to go into the Services and into all walks of life, but wherever they go, they will carry a great tradition with them, for the school itself is rich in tradition and carries with it the tradition of the Church. All Saints is a happy school, and of the value of such a school to the boys who pass through it, and to the community at large it would be impossible to speak too highly".

THE CHOIR SCHOOL DURING THE WAR YEARS 1939-1945

On the outbreak of War there was considerable anxiety about the Choir School. The question arose: should it immediately be disbanded? This was not the view of the Archbishop of Canterbury who wrote to the Vicar as follows: "I think it would be very disastrous if this Choir School with all its great traditions should come to an end. Even if this were only for a time it would be difficult to re-establish it when this present war condition is over".

By great efforts Dom Bernard secured two large gifts of £500 and an annual donation for the duration of the war of £500. Thus the Choir School was saved and continued its work without interruption first at Searles, Sussex, the beautiful home of the aged parents of the Revd. Sir Percy Maryon Wilson, Bart.; and then when the army requisitioned the house after only 18 months stay, at St. Mary's Freeland, 9 miles from Oxford. St. Mary's which had previously been run by Miss Shipman and her two able helpers Miss Jebb and Miss Victor as a Retreat House was eminently suitable for a school.

Once or twice a term the boys came up to London to sing at All Saints. They also took part in Sir Sydney

Nicholson's 'Festival for Boy Choristers' at Westminster Abbey. Many months after this Festival the Vicar received a letter from a headmaster of another choir school. This is what he wrote:

"I want to thank your boys for the splendid influence their reverence and behaviour in the Abbey had on my choristers. When they got home, they said 'If those boys can behave like that, so can we'. From that time they took the matter into their own hands, and the influence on the spirit of our services has been felt ever since—a tradition of greater reverence had been formed as a direct result of the unconscious influence of your boys that day".

From their first evacuation home in Sussex, the headmaster wrote: "We regarded our evacuation as a temporary transplanting to the country of a vital piece of the corporate life of All Saints Church. Regarding the school in this light we endeavoured to carry on its life and work in much the same way as we should have done at Margaret Street".

"You can picture the choristers in their cerise red cassocks and their white surplices moving solemnly in procession down the main staircase of this country house to sing Mass or Evensong in Chapel. Then later after service, the return; an anthem sung from the top of the staircase and then the Angelus. It is a moving spectacle and I wish all members of the congregation could see it."

"The canonization of St. John Bosco, the reading of Henri Geon's book 'The Secret of St. John Bosco', together with a film of his life, gave the Choir School a great devotion to the Saint. Every detail of the life of this Apostle of Youth became known to the boys, so it is not surprising that we should regard him as the Patron Saint of the Choir School—or Night Prayers always end 'May Blessed Mary, Blessed John Bosco and all the Saints pray for us'."

"At the beginning of our life here we prayed that Our Lord's Will might be done with regard to the future of the Choir School. The faith of the boys during the time of waiting was extraordinary. One boy said to me, 'I just can't believe that Our Lord means our Choir School to come to an end'."

On Tuesday, November 28th, a Votive Mass of St. John Bosco was said with special intention for the future of the Choir School. On that day I received a wire from the Vicar telling me that the miracle had happened, that an anonymous donor had promised £500 and that the Choir School was saved. When I read out the telegram, several boys rushed to me saying, 'John Bosco, John Bosco, has done it! He has asked Our Lord to work the miracle!'.

Such was the faith and prayer of the children of the Choir School in those critical days. Dom Bernard wrote in the Parish Paper, "I had worked very hard for some time to save the Choir School if possible, and I had had powerful friends working for me and with me, but this overwhelming response came not as a result of work of that sort, but in answer to the prayers of children and I do thank them and the Saints of God whose prayers they asked and the God in whom they trusted". As a result of these gifts to the Choir School and the raising of the School fees the School became self-supporting and financially independent of All Saints Church for the remainder of the War.

It was in these days when it looked as if it might have to be closed down that James Peschek, then Head Boy, composed "The Road to Heaven, or Fifteen Poems for the Rosary". The direct and limpid beauty of some of these poems by a boy of fourteen years old attracted the attention of the then Editor of the *Church Times*.

It was said of these poems that they have the lilt of the French Carol. They indeed breathe the same spirit of loving devotion to Our Lord and His Lady Mother. These poems are still used daily by the Choristers in their recitation of the Rosary.

Whilst the Choir School was at Freeland, the Choristers used from time to time to visit the Morris-Cowley works at Oxford and give recitals of Music to Lord Nuffield's workers in their dinner-hour. They also gave Sacred Concerts in neighbouring Churches. After one given in Woodstock Parish Church, the Duke of Marlborough wrote to the Headmaster, "I did not have an opportunity last night of thanking you for coming over to our Sacred Concert so hasten to do so now. It was most kind of you and your boys magnificent singing and general appearance was highly appreciated by everyone. In fact may I say it was the outstanding feature of the concert". After another given in Wooton Parish Church, the Rector wrote "I thanked you when you left Wooton Parish Church on that (to us) memorable Sunday evening—but my thanking expressed only a tiny bit of the gratitude I felt. It was good indeed of you, and your nice lads, to come, and give us such a treat—so beautiful, and so reverent. I loved the singing of New College and Magdalen in the old days of Oxford—but never have I heard any singing in my life more deeply beautiful than that of your boys in our old village Church". Mrs. Walter Vale visited the Choir School at Freeland and wrote afterwards, "I can't tell you what a joy it was to hear some of the results of all you have done for the All Saints' music. I have not heard anything so beautiful and so finished for a long time; and I never thought I should ever hear Walter's music sung again like that. I am sure he would love what the children did yesterday".

Another visitor describes her experience as follows:

"Matron conducted me to a nearby wood which soon came alive with boys. Sunburnt and beaming they sprung up on every side in their brown shorts. Then we all trooped back to tea. Afterwards I was taken to the very beautiful Chapel where they have Daily Mass and in which is the famous statue of St. John Bosco. I was also fortunate enough to see Miss Shipman, who says she has never repented of her generosity, and told me it was literally true that Dom Bernard did sit on her doorstep, as he told us, when the transaction was in progress. 'In fact I sent him away once', she said, 'but then I telegraphed. He was a difficult person to refuse anything'."

"Of course the loveliest moment was when we went into the tiny village church for Evensong. The boys sang unaccompanied, serious and entirely absorbed, every syllable clear. It made no difference to them that the congregation was only six. They were singing to God. It so happened that three days before I had heard a famous boy's choir at an annual festival of music sing the same anthem, Wesley's 'Thou will keep him in perfect peace'. There was no comparison in poise, discipline and sensitiveness. The Psalms, too, 'The Lord is King and hath put on glorious apparel'. and 'O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth' were perfect in rhythm and interpretation".

THE RETURN OF THE CHOIR SCHOOL

THE importance of the return of the choristers to Margaret Street was emphasized in a letter which the Precentor received from Sir Sydney Nicholson, the Founder, and until his death, the Director of the Royal School of Church Music:—

"The return of the Choir School to its old home after its enforced sojourn in the country is an event of importance to the musical life of the Church, not only in the parish of All Saints, but for the joy and inspiration that the

singing of the boys will once more be able to bring to thousands of worshippers from outside".

"The school is in many ways unique, and is a living example of what can be done, where there is a will to do it, in a church which has no choral endowments, and is dependent for the support of its music mainly on the generosity of those who value it".

"It was a brave decision to keep the Choir School going when evacuation became necessary: to keep up the standard in a remote country place like Freeland was a remarkable achievement, due almost entirely to the splendid enthusiasm and determination to overcome all obstacles shown by the Master. And I can speak from personal knowledge as to how well the tradition was kept alive from a happy recollection of a visit to the School and a memorable recital which the boys gave me of entirely unaccompanied music, in the little church of which they had the temporary use".

"For at least 800 years there has been a continuous tradition of boys singing the music of the Church of England. It began in the monasteries, spread to the Cathedrals and larger Parish Churches and all our English Church music was written for a choir of this kind and most of it by composers who had themselves begun their musical training as choristers. After the Reformation the use of boys in Parish Churches largely disappeared, indeed the music except in Cathedrals and similar foundations became almost negligible. But with the Oxford Movement of 100 years ago the traditional form of choir, consisting of boys and men was revived, and spread throughout the Church, so that it has become the normal. The advantage of this to the musical life of the Country has been enormous, and thousands of boys have got their first sight into choral music through membership of a Church choir and have gone on to form the backbone of the choral music of our

nation. When the prominent part taken by All Saints in the Oxford Movement is remembered, surely the desirability and responsibility for continuing this choir on its traditional lines cannot be disputed".

"But a choir school cannot be maintained without a big effort: it is bound to be costly, and the bulk of the cost has to be met by the Church that is brave enough to shoulder the responsibility. In such cases there is sometimes a tendency to ask whether it is worth the expense, and to talk vaguely of 'religious luxury', but a choir is not established in order to gratify the congregation that can afford it; it is for the glory of God—to offer in worship the very best we can produce".

"Once the question was asked 'To what purpose is this waste!' There is more than ever need to remember the answer".

THE CENTENARY OF THE CHOIR SCHOOL

SINCE ST. ANDREW'S DAY, 1848, is the date against the first entry in the Register of the Choir School, the Centenary was kept on St. Andrew's Day, Thurdsay, November 30th, 1948. High Mass was sung to Rheinberger in E flat by the boys of the school.

The Centenary Luncheon took place on Sunday, January 9th at Kettner's, Romilly Street. As a result of this commemoration of the Centenary, the Old Choristers Association was re-organized, and Old Choristers who have not yet joined the Association should write to the Honorary Secretary, Mr. Charles Hoile, 7 Margaret Street, W.1.

Perhaps sufficient has been written to show why, for a hundred years, Choristers of All Saints, Margaret Street, have, under God, been able "to set forth the glory and beauty of Christian worship in such a way as shall always conduce to devotion and help the worship of the heart".